



Stepping Stones Preschool

Inspection report for early years provision

Unique Reference Number	511673
Inspection date	07 March 2007
Inspector	Carole Argles
Setting Address	36 Shaftesbury Street, Fordingbridge, Hampshire, SP6 1JF
Telephone number	07796 644970 or 01425 656038
E-mail	
Registered person	Stepping Stones Pre School
Type of inspection	Integrated
Type of care	Full day care

ABOUT THIS INSPECTION

The purpose of this inspection is to assure government, parents and the public of the quality of childcare and, if applicable, of nursery education. The inspection was carried out under Part XA Children Act 1989 as introduced by the Care Standards Act 2000 and, where nursery education is provided, under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004; the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding; and, where nursery education is provided, the *Curriculum guidance for the foundation stage*.

The report includes information on any complaints about the childcare provision which Ofsted has received since the last inspection or registration or 1 April 2004 whichever is the later.

The key inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality

Good: this aspect of the provision is strong

Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound

Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

For more information about early years inspections, please see the booklet *Are you ready for your inspection?* which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT SORT OF SETTING IS IT?

Stepping Stones Pre-school opened in 1997. It is managed by a voluntary committee of parents and operates from the community centre in the town of Fordingbridge, Hampshire. It uses two rooms for the pre-school sessions and a separate room for the lunch club. The pre-school is registered to provide care for 35 children aged between two and under five years and serves the local area. There are currently 44 children on roll of whom 33 receive funding for nursery education. The pre-school is open five days a week during school term times from 09:15 to 15:30.

The pre-school supports children who have learning difficulties or disabilities and who speak English as an additional language. There are nine staff who work with the children, of whom seven hold an appropriate early years qualification. There is a parent and toddler group which

operates from the same premises two mornings per week and this is run by a qualified member of staff.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PROVISION

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The children have many opportunities for exercise and this helps to keep them fit. The sessions always include periods of physical play either in the playground or in one of the spacious rooms. The children are developing good control and coordination of their movements. They use a suitable range of larger apparatus for climbing and balancing, and were enthusiastically completing a sponsored obstacle course. They show a developing awareness of space as they pedal wheeled toys round a course, crawl through tunnels or play parachute games. The children go outside to play in most weathers and look forward to this time and this encourages them to adopt an active lifestyle.

The premises and equipment are suitably clean for the children to use. The staff promote good hygiene, wiping the tables before snacks and providing paper towels for hand drying. The children learn good hygiene routines and wash their hands before eating and after using the toilet. However, at present all the children share a bowl of water to wash their hands before their snack and this increases the risk of infection spreading between them. There are suitable procedures in place to ensure the safe administration of any medication to the children and to promote their safety in the event of an accident. Most members of staff hold a first aid certificate and a well stocked first aid kit is readily available.

The children take part in many activities to help them understand about the importance of eating a healthy diet. They cook and prepare foods such as fruit salads and they look at and talk about a range of fruit and vegetables. They learn about the importance of good dental hygiene. The children have a healthy mid-session snack of fresh fruits and vegetables. Drinking water is readily available for them to take as required. Many children bring packed lunches which are stored in a refrigerator to keep them fresh. Parents receive information about nutritious foods for their children. Children who have any special dietary requirements or allergies are well supported by the staff who are vigilant to ensure their safety and welfare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The pre-school runs from a community centre and has sole use of the rooms it uses during the sessions. The premises are well maintained, bright and warm and provide ample room for the children to move and play freely. The main play area is decorated with many murals, displays and posters to make it welcoming to the children who are comfortable and secure. The staff make effective use of the three rooms available to meet the children's developmental needs and have the flexibility to provide different types of activity simultaneously. The children can access the fully enclosed outside play area directly from the main playrooms. There is a very wide range of toys and equipment to support all areas of the children's learning. Items are of

good quality and safe and suitable for the children and there is an ongoing programme to buy new resources.

There are effective measures in place to promote the children's safety and minimise the risk of accidental injury to them. Staff have a good understanding of safety issues and conduct regular risk assessments, taking action to reduce any identified hazards. Suitable safety equipment is in place to protect the children including fire guards, socket covers and cupboard locks. The children understand how to act in the event of an emergency because they take part in regular fire drills. They begin to find out how to keep themselves safe through discussions with staff. They learn about road safety and begin to consider the consequences of their actions, for example, learning that they may hurt themselves if they run in the classroom. The children are well supervised at all times.

There are suitable procedures in place which contribute well towards safeguarding children from harm and copies of these are made freely available to the parents. The staff have a clear understanding of how they must act if they have concerns about the welfare of a child. Cloakroom facilities are shared with other users of the centre. The staff are very aware of the importance of protecting children from people who have not been vetted. Good staffing ratios are maintained so that they can supervise the children well when they use this area and they are vigilant to ensure that only authorised people collect the children at the end of the sessions.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

The children are happy, settled and confident. They readily part from their parents and carers and settle quickly at the activities. The children form a warm and friendly relationship with the staff who know them well and there is plenty of interaction and conversation between them. The staff work directly with the children and talking with them about themselves and what they are doing. This supports the children's language and communication skills effectively. The staff give help and assistance when required but also allow the children space to play independently. The children play well together and develop friendships with their peers. They receive praise and recognition for their achievements and examples of their artwork are displayed on the walls. This promotes the children's confidence and encourages them to develop a positive self-image.

There is a wide range of toys and resources to support all areas of the children's learning. The staff set up the room before children arrive so that it is welcoming for them. Morning sessions are provided for children of all ages, whilst afternoon sessions cater only for those children who will be starting school in the following September. There is a suitable routine for the sessions which includes opportunities for exercise as well as a balance of self-chosen and adult-led activities. The children understand this timetable and this provides security for any who are less confident. However, the organisation of snack times means that children must wait around for lengthy periods and therefore are not using their time usefully.

The children are keen to take part in the varied and interesting range of activities and many show sustained concentration. Each child has an allocated key-person who monitors and records their progress and considers the next stage of their development. Staff are beginning to use

the Birth to three matters framework when working with younger or less able children. As a result, the children are generally progressing well.

Nursery education

The quality of the teaching and learning is satisfactory and the children are making sound progress towards the early learning goals. The staff have a sound knowledge and understanding of the Foundation Stage curriculum and use this to help them plan and provide a wide curriculum for the children. They evaluate and record the children's progress and are beginning to use this information to help them plan the next steps in their learning. However, some areas of the children's learning for example, their understanding and use of number, are not given equal emphasis in the curriculum. Staff do not always use opportunities in the children's play to extend their learning and problem solving skills. Morning sessions are provided for children of all ages and abilities. Often the activities are less challenging particularly for the more able children than during the afternoon sessions which are more structured and the children are often grouped by ability.

Most children are confident and readily talk with adults and their peers and many eagerly offer their ideas in group activities. They understand that there are times when they should sit quietly such as at registration, story and snack times. However, often there is limited space for the children to sit comfortably and sometimes it is difficult for them to see and interact with the adult leading the group. Consequently some children do not become fully involved. However, generally the children are interested in the activities and keen to take part. They are becoming independent both with their personal care, putting on their own coats and aprons, and working alone at self-chosen tasks, such as completing puzzles or making models with construction activities. Although children can initiate their own play by choosing toys and activities from cupboards in the play area, few do so because the organisation of the resources makes selection difficult.

Many children speak clearly, taking turns in conversation and asking and responding to questions. They talk about real and imaginary ideas and some make up stories in their pretend play with others. They are beginning to understand how to link sounds with letters and most can recognise their names. The children manipulate many small objects such as figures and animals, puzzle pieces and pegs, and they use simple tools such as scissors. As a result, they are developing good hand-eye coordination and control of their movements. Although there is a unit containing paper and writing materials, the children use them infrequently. They are rarely encouraged to make marks for a purpose, for example, in the role play area or to name their artwork. The children enjoy music and singing, often joining in enthusiastically with the words. Some afternoon children have the benefit of a music teacher joining them and they explore the sounds made by simple instruments and are developing a sense of rhythm. The children enjoy using chalk and paint and were printing with fruits and vegetables. Staff allow them to explore the paint freely, printing with their hands and developing their own designs.

There are many activities to help the children find out about the world around them and to discover how things work and change. They grow seeds and look at plants and discuss the weather; they observe the sequences in the lifecycles of frogs and butterflies; they explore materials using magnets and they cook. Staff plan and provide some innovative activities to

support the children's learning. For example, recently in a topic about homes, the children helped to make a model of a mud hut. They wove sticks to make a framework, which they then covered with clay, and used hay to thatch the roof. The children find out about their local community, visiting venues such as the library and shops, and they begin to learn about the wider world and differences in culture and traditions. Some children use a computer to support their learning and are beginning to learn how to control the mouse effectively. They use their imaginations well in pretend play and talk about models they have made with construction toys.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered. The children behave well and play cooperatively together, sharing fairly and taking turns. The staff have a good understanding of positive ways to help them learn to manage their own behaviour. They have age-appropriate expectations for the children and often remind them of these at the beginning of the session. For example, they talk with them about taking care with the toys and about being kind to others. The children receive praise and are sometimes rewarded with stickers so they understand when they have done well and develop good self-esteem. The staff are good role models and always treat the children with courtesy and respect. They copy this example and are polite and considerate to others, for example, listening quietly to others at 'show and tell times'.

The pre-school is welcoming to all. The children's individual needs are met effectively and their individuality is valued by the staff who show a genuine interest in them. Staff respect parents' wishes for their child and are careful to ensure that all are included. Children who have any additional needs, learning difficulties or disabilities are well supported by the staff who work closely with parents and others to ensure that individual care needs are met. Their development is carefully planned, with activities adapted or additional resources obtained if appropriate. The staff frequently undertake training to extend their knowledge and to ensure that all children are able to attend the pre-school. A group of staff and parents are currently attending a Makaton course and all children are beginning to learn to use signs in the sessions so that they can communicate with others.

The children begin to learn about their own community and the wider world. There are links between the pre-school and other local organisations including the primary school which many children later attend. Visitors such as police and fire officers come to talk with the children about their roles in the community. A wide range of resources which show positive images of diversity are in everyday use. These include books, puzzles, pretend play resources and dressing up clothes. The staff plan activities to help children learn out about different cultures and traditions. Recently they have been finding out about the Chinese New Year, and staff have provided a display of interesting artefacts. The children are beginning to learn some vocabulary of other languages and enjoy answering "Bonjour" at registration time. Examples of different scripts and languages are displayed around the room. This approach encourages the children to develop an accepting and tolerant attitude towards others.

The partnership with parents and carers is good and this benefits the children's learning and care. Effective communication is established from the outset. New children are helped to settle quickly because staff request information from parents about their care and development so that they can ensure that the children feel comfortable and secure. Parents are well informed about the activities and their child's progress and they frequently talk with their child's key-person. They receive copies of the activity plans and a termly report. Staff welcome parents' involvement, encouraging them to help in the sessions, and to comment on their child's progress and plans for their future learning. Parents receive suitable information about the Foundation Stage curriculum and leaflets are available giving suggestions on how they can support their child's learning through play activities at home.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The provision meets the needs of the range of children for whom it provides.

The children benefit from the sound organisation of the pre-school. All the required records are maintained and are shared with parents as appropriate. Most of the policies and procedures necessary to promote the children's welfare and development are in place. This includes a sound procedure to ensure that new staff are suitable to work with the children. Although there is a written complaints procedure, this does not clearly show how the provider would address and log any written complaints from parents.

A high ratio of staff to children is maintained at all times and this ensures that the children are well supervised and receive plenty of attention and support. The staff use the premises effectively to the children's needs and provide a range of activities but the organisation and storage of resources does not encourage them to select items independently and initiate their own learning. There is an active parent management committee who are supportive of the staff and who work hard to raise funds to develop the pre-school's facilities to enrich the children's care and learning.

The leadership and management is satisfactory. The staff are well motivated and work effectively together so the sessions run smoothly for the children. They frequently undertake training to extend their knowledge of child care issues and many are studying to gain further qualifications. The committee are establishing suitable procedures to monitor staff performance through annual appraisals. The staff reflect on their practice and have correctly identified several areas for further development to enhance the children's learning. Currently they are implementing strategies to achieve this. They monitor the breadth of the curriculum and consider how well the teaching helps the children learn. This is generally effective with most areas of the children's development being well supported and consequently they are making sound progress.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the previous inspection, the provider agreed to review the organisation of large group activities, the planning of the afternoon sessions, and the organisation of creative resources. The provider also agreed to maintain the accident records and register accurately, to undertake regular fire drills, and to update the child protection procedures.

Children now have sufficient space at small group activities and in the role-play area and staff frequently sit and work with them, engaging in conversations and supporting them in what they are doing. Although group activities, such as the registration time, have been reviewed, the children are still cramped and consequently do not always participate fully. The planning and organisation of the afternoon sessions has been revised. There is a balance of periods when the children choose what they do and adult-led activities, where at times they are grouped by ability. This helps to ensure the children receive appropriate levels of challenge to move them forward in their learning. Since the last inspection, the staff have made a box containing a suitable range of creative resources including papers, collage materials, scissors and glue sticks. This is made available for the children to access independently as a self-chosen activity.

The systems for recording the times of children's attendance and any accidents have been revised and now include all the required details. Fire drills are conducted at regular intervals and at times when the children and staff are using different parts of the building. Details are recorded and reviewed to ensure that there is swift evacuation of the premises at all times. The provider has revised the child protection procedure and all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities. This action has enhanced the children's safety and welfare.

Complaints since the last inspection

Since 1 April 2004, there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required the provider or Ofsted to take any action in order to meet the National Standards.

The provider is required to keep a record of complaints made by parents, which they can see on request. The complaints record may contain complaints other than those made to Ofsted.

THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE CARE AND NURSERY EDUCATION

On the basis of the evidence collected on this inspection:

The quality and standards of the care are satisfactory. The registered person meets the National Standards for under 8s day care and childminding.

The quality and standards of the nursery education are satisfactory.

WHAT MUST BE DONE TO SECURE FUTURE IMPROVEMENT?

The quality and standards of the care

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the hand washing facilities
- review the complaints procedure to ensure that it is fully compliant with current legislation

The quality and standards of the nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- develop the planning of activities to ensure that the staff consistently provide appropriate levels of challenge for the children in all areas of their learning
- review the organisation of the daily routines, giving particular attention to snack and circle times, and the organisation of resources to encourage children to make more choices about what they do. [Also applies to Child Care]

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the leaflet *Complaints about Ofsted Early Years: concerns or complaints about Ofsted's role in regulating and inspecting childcare and early education* (HMI ref no 2599) which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk